

Sermon notes for Parashat Vayetzei – Human Rights Shabbat 5777

Modern Day Slavery

(prepared by Rabbi Lea Mühlstein of Tzelem)

The slippery slope into modern day slavery

- Focus on Jacob's indentured servitude in Laban's household (Genesis chapter 29 and 30) – look at the transition from voluntarily entering servitude for Laban and then the subsequent indentured servitude that Jacob has to endure to “pay” for the privilege of actually marrying Rachel.
- Discuss whether this is an example of slavery – look at the study resource for Jewish sources on defining slavery – not the fact that Jacob has to work for 7 years!
- Compare this to the definition of slavery and servitude in the Modern Slavery Act 2015
(<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/contents/enacted>):

Section 1: Slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour

(1) A person commits an offence if—

- (a) the person holds another person in slavery or servitude and the circumstances are such that the person knows or ought to know that the other person is held in slavery or servitude, or
- (b) the person requires another person to perform forced or compulsory labour and the circumstances are such that the person knows or ought to know that the other person is being required to perform forced or compulsory labour.

(2) In subsection (1) the references to holding a person in slavery or servitude or requiring a person to perform forced or compulsory labour

are to be construed in accordance with Article Four of the European Human Rights Convention.

(3) In determining whether a person is being held in slavery or servitude or required to perform forced or compulsory labour, regard may be had to all the circumstances.

(4) For example, regard may be had—

(a) to any of the person's personal circumstances (such as the person being a child, the person's family relationships, and any mental or physical illness) which may make the person more vulnerable than other persons;

(b) to any work or services provided by the person, including work or services provided in circumstances which constitute exploitation within section 3(3) to (6).

(5) The consent of a person (whether an adult or a child) to any of the acts alleged to constitute holding the person in slavery or servitude, or requiring the person to perform forced or compulsory labour, does not preclude a determination that the person is being held in slavery or servitude, or required to perform forced or compulsory labour.

- Compare this to Article Four of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (referred to in the legislation):
Article Four: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.
- Share a real-life example of modern day slavery, e.g. look at the case studies used in the Human Rights Shabbat pack.
- Explain how individuals can get involved in campaigning through René Cassin in partnership with Tzelem.